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SUBJECT: SOCIALISTS, LEFTISTS RECONSTITUTE THREE PARTY COALITION,
OUTLINE NEW CATALAN GOVERNMENT

REF: BARCELONA 166 AND PREVIOUS

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11. (SBU) Summary: The leaders of the PSC, ERC, and the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV), the three-party coalition (Tripartite), which has governed Catalonia since 2003, agreed in principal November 4 to reprise their oft-fractious partnership and form the next autonomous regional government. ERC leader Josep Carod Rovira announced the agreement after a two-day round of marathon talks. PSC presidential candidate Jose Montilla will be named President - the first non-Catalan born president in the region's history. Carod will encumber the newly created position of Vice President (formerly First Counselor). Reaction from the CiU was swift: presidential candidate Artur Mas accused Montilla and Carod of "tricking" the voters. CiU Secgen and Spanish Parliament member Josep Antoni Duran Lleida immediately announced his party would pull its support from PM Zapatero, both have since moderated their early remarks. Playing to his strength as stable and serious, Montilla will have to move quickly to allay fears that he is not focused enough on Catalan interests, even as he works to implement the Catalan autonomy statute (Estatut). Otherwise, he could find himself facing the same problems his predecessor faced with an outspoken coalition partner that focuses more narrowly on Catalan independence rather than broader social and economic issues. End Summary.

PSC-ERC-ICV Tripartite: Round Two

12. (SBU) Republican Left of Catalan (ERC) President Josep Lluís Carod Rovira announced November 4 that the three parties that made up the previous governing coalition in Catalonia - the so-called Tripartite - had reached agreement to reform the alliance, thus, denying Artur Mas and the Convergence and Union (CiU) the chance to form the government. (Note: The CiU coalition won the November 1 elections, but did not win an outright majority (reftel). End note.) Socialist Party of Catalan (PSC) presidential candidate Jose Montilla will be elected President of the autonomous region (Generalitat); Carod will occupy the newly created position of Vice President, and Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV) President Joan Saur will likely occupy the third most important position as Counselor for the Interior and Institutional Relations and Participation. The three parties will have a total of 70 seats in the Parliament; two seats more than necessary to control Parliament. Montilla's investiture will be an historic occasion as he will become the first non-Catalan born president in the region's history, a subject that ran as an undercurrent throughout the election. In remarks November 7, Montilla presented his new team to the press November 7, and in his statement he declared, "I am aware that

all was not positive during the last legislature, but in life what is important is not to not commit mistakes, but to learn from your mistakes~we will not repeat the mistakes of the past."

¶3. (U) In this vein, the coalition reportedly has agreed to the following broad guidelines:

No surprises - Carod and Saura have apparently agreed to inform Montilla before taking any actions that might adversely affect the Generalitat.

Unity first - The three leaders have agreed to put the interests of the autonomous region before party interests.

All for Catalonia - Social issues, including housing, education, and employment, will be the focus of the Generalitat.

Sharp CiU Reaction

¶4. (SBU) The reaction from CiU presidential candidate Artur Mas, and CiU Secgen and Spanish Parliamentarian Jose Antoni Duran, was swift and angry. Mas accused Montilla and Carod of "tricking" the voters into believing another Tripartite was not an option. Duran announced his party would not continue to support the government of PM Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. Both later moderated their initial remarks as foreshadowed to the CG by Joan Russell, Popular Party (PP) insider and President of the Catalan Manufacturers Association.

Catalans Calm

¶5. (SBU) Catalans have reacted calmly to the news of the Tripartite resurgence. Polls leading up to November 1 indicated that this might be a possible outcome of the election. What might have taken some by surprise was the speed with which the coalition came together to form their government. Media reported some small, but noisy protests in and around Barcelona, but no other activity of note. It appears Catalans are either resigned, or simply willing to give Montilla and his new team a chance.

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¶6. (SBU) Comment: Once confirmed in Parliament, Montilla will have to quickly show his government is ready for work as his grace period will likely be short, and an angry CiU will be nipping at his shoes from the start. A first order of business is likely to be quick implementation of the Estatut, and even this will take the measure of Montilla's ability. It was the ERC that refused to vote in favor of the Estatut, which resulted in its expulsion from the coalition over the summer and the call for early elections. Montilla will also have to allay ERC (for a start) fears that he might be soft on Catalan interests, an issue the CiU (at a minimum) will want to use against him during his mandate. At the national level, the coalition is already paying dividends: according to press reports, the ERC quickly supported the PSOE in the Spanish Parliament on several budgetary issues after CiU parliamentarians withdrew their support. End Comment.

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